Hadhrat Shaykh Fazal Ali Qureshi and Deoband

Hadhrat Shaykh Fazal Ali Qureshi was the greatest Shaykh of Naqshbandi Mujaddidi tariqah in the 20th century in the Indian subcontinent. Considered as a Mujaddid (reformer) by his Khulafa, he had hundreds of thousands of followers in all over the subcontinent from the west in Punjab to the east in Bengal.

His Khulafa are known to be 66 in general, but the list shows 67. Another two, who were given khilafat by his khulafa, also received a direct khilafat from the Shaykh. These include Shaykh Ghulam Habib, who was actually a khalifa of Mawlana Abdul Malik Siddiqi, and Mawlana Zawwar Hussain Shah, who was a khalifa of Mawlana Muhammad Saeed Qureshi (rahmatullah alaihim).

Most of his Khulafa are known to follow the Deoband school of thought, as they were actually scholars who followed the scholars of Deoband. But other Khulafa did not follow the Deoband school, rather they stuck to the original teachings of the Shaykh and followed only his way in matters of Fiqh as well as Tasawwuf.

Here I want to discuss the claim made by many of his khulafa that the Shaykh also followed the Deoband school of thought. This claim is made only on the basis of observation, but does not have any authentic confirmation from the shaykh. I will show from historical evidence that Hadhrat Shaykh Fazal Ali Qureshi was not affiliated to the Deoband school of thought, rather he only went there to preach his tariqah and spiritual Fayd to those scholars who were devoid of it.

Visiting the madrasah of Deoband

Hadhrat Shaykh went to the madrasah of Deoband and lived there for a couple of days. This is considered by some people to be a sign of devotion and affiliation of the shaykh towards Deoband. But if looked with a complete perspective, it is rather a sign of Deoband madrasah's fall in following the Sunnah and Hadhrat Shaykh's efforts to revive Sunnah in that center of learning.

Mawlana Abdur-Rauf Shah was the son-in-law of Hadhrat Pir Fazal Ali Qureshi. He once told that the shaykh did not go to Deoband due to any devotion or affiliation, rather he went there for reviving the Sunnah of the Prophet (s.a.w).

He told that once the Shaykh went to a gathering near the city of Deoband, preaching Islam and tariqah to the people, as he did all his life travelling vast distances for the same purpose. There, some people told the shaykh that Deoband is a center of learning and many famous scholars teach there, but as a matter of fact, Sunnah is not observed there; many students cut their beards (less than the Sunnah), etc. Upon this, the shaykh went there, accompanied by his khalifa Mawlana Abdul Malik Siddiqi who had previous contacts with the madrasah and its scholars.

Mawlana Abdul Malik writes in Tajalliyat that once the shaykh was in madrasah of Deoband, and at the time of Zuhr prayer, Qari Muhammad Tayyab came to lead the congregation. He was his head with a cap. After the prayer, the Shaykh said "not following the great Sunnah even in the center of learning?", pointing to the lack of following the Sunnah of Amama (turban). At this, Qari sahib asked someone to bring the Amama and put it near the place of Imam, so whoever would lead the congregation, would take that and place it on the head.

This shows the state of affairs in that madrasah, and the reason for the Shaykh to go there. Reviving the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) was the sole objective of the Shaykh's life, and he did not hesitate to go to any place to achieve that object.

One important reason for this is that the Awliya-Allah usually let everyone come to them and take the spirituality and love from them. As it evident from the history, the great saints would even allow Hindus to remain in their company and would teach them, without forcing them to convert to Islam. This is due to the fact that Awliya-Allah love humanity regardless of their color and creed. The Shaykh was a great saint of his times, and he would go anywhere to teach the spirituality and love to everyone, regardless of his creed. This is proved from that fact that he even went to the Ahl-e-Hadith people to show them the right path and teach them the real spirit of Islam, without criticizing them for their creed. This does not mean that the shaykh was in any way affiliated to them, rather merely a sign of his love for the whole humanity. Visiting the school of Deoband also shows he had a strong passion to teach people the Zikr of Allah, specially the Qalbi Zikr as practiced in the Mujaddidi tariqah.

The shaykh paid respect to the scholars of all creeds, not because of their beliefs but because of their status in the society. He respected the Deobandi scholars, but did not affiliate himself to any of them. Hadhrat Pir Mitha, one of his foremost khulafa, narrates that once the Shaykh said, "Moulvi Ashraf Ali Thanvi is a scholar, but being a person of Batin (a spiritual person) and Waliullah (a saint) is a different thing." This shows his respect for them was only due to their scholarly works, but he did not follow their creed or school of thought.

As opposed to the claim made by Deobandi scholars and khulafa of Pir Qureshi (regarding the Shaykh's affiliation with the Deoband), it is evident from reliable sources the rather the Deobandi scholars were devoted to the Shaykh and highly revered him. Qari Muhammad Tayyab

(mentioned above) once helped the Shaykh put on his shoes, a sign of great respect and admiration. Sayyad Ataullah Shah Bukhari, a famous Deobandi scholar, once visited the Shaykh while he was plowing his lands. The Shaykh immediately taught him the Qalbi Zikr with which Shah Sahib's heart started the Zikr. He had high respect of the shaykh due to this.

Pir Qureshi's school of thought

Hadhrat Pir Fazal Ali Qureshi followed the creed of Ahl-as-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah and the Mujaddidi school of thought, the blessed way followed by his Shuyukh as well. Here I present some facts which show his Maslak was different from the Deobandi school of thought.

Once a khalifa of Pir Qureshi claimed to Hadhrat Abdul Ghaffar alias Pir Mitha that Hadhrat shaykh was a Deobandi. Hadhrat Pir Mitha replied that he was not, and quoted an event witnessed by them both. He reminded him that when the Shaykh went to Ajmer Sharif on the Urs of Hadhrat Khwaja Mueenuddin Chishti, the shaykh not only allowed his followers to listen to the Qawwali (sufi poetry sung with music) sung with musical instruments, he himself listened to it at the time of leaving. He even gave money to the singers as a homage, according to the local custom. This act was due to the reverence and love of Khwaja Ajmeri, otherwise Shaykh Fazal Ali Qureshi would never allow his followers to listen to any kind of music. But even this special permission is against the rulings of Deobandi school of thought, who would never allow it.

It is also known that Hadhrat Pir Qureshi allowed to build Mazar (shrine) on the graves of Awliya-Allah (saints). Once he was in Delhi and went to the shrines of famous saints there. After coming out from there, he saw a tomb near the city and asked about whose tomb is that? No one knew that, until the shaykh himself replied that this is the tomb of Humayun (Mughal emperor). Then the shaykh said that the builders of this tomb had a right intention to build it, as this area has more population of

Hindus. They thought that the emperor was a Muslim, and building his tomb would glorify him, and, as a result, would glorify a Muslim to the local Hindus. This was against the Hindu custom of burning the corpses.

After this, the Shaykh said that building the tombs of Awliya-Allah is right, as not only the person in the grave is revered, but the tomb also provides a place to sit and rest for the visitors who come from long distances. This is narrated by Hadhrat Abdul Ghaffar alias Pir Mitha.

Another fact that proves this, is that the Shaykh himself built a covered room as his final burial place, and told this to Hadhrat Pir Mitha and Mawlana Abdul Sattar (both khulafa of Pir Qureshi) and asked them to bury him there. At the time of death, Mawlana Abdul Sattar was there and he told the people the Shaykh's will, so they buried him there.

These facts show that the Shaykh allowed building tombs and covered shrines on the graves of saints, as opposed to the Deobandi scholars who do not allow this and consider it a grave sin to do so.

Another difference of opinion of the Shaykh with the Deobandi scholars is to cover the graves of saints with a sheet of cloth. This is common in the shrines, but the Deobandi scholars forbid it and consider it a sin and Bid'ah.

Hadhrat Pir Mitha narrates that once the Shaykh was sitting in a shrine, reciting the Khatam for that saint. Meanwhile a person came with a sheet of cloth and started covering the grave with that. While he was trying to cover one part of the grave that the other side would not fit. The Shaykh himself helped him cover the grave properly with that cloth. Afterwards when the shaykh came out of the shrine, he told his followers that covering the graves of saints with clothes is allowed and a good action, as it adds to the reverence of the saint and saves the grave from outer filth and dirt.

Deobandi scholars oppose the act of Istighasa (asking help from anyone other than Allah), and never allow to directly ask help from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). But Shaykh Fazal Ali Qureshi not only believed in Istighasa from the Prophet, he sometimes would start calling upon the Prophet in a state of ecstasy and love.

Mawlana Abdul Malik Siddiqi writes in Tajalliyat that the first time he went to the Shaykh in a masjid in Ahmadpur East (Ahmadpar Sharqiya in Bahawalpur, Pakistani Punjab), there were many Ahl-e-Hadith people attending his Halqa. During the Halqa (Zikr) the shaykh came in a state of ecstasy and started calling upon the Prophet directly with loud voice. No one objected to that afterwards, even though the majority of people were non-Muqallid (Wahhabi) who did not believe in Istighasa. It is worth mentioning the Mawlana Siddiqi himself belonged to the Ahl-e-Hadith, but converted to Hanafi after initiating with the shaykh.

This is also proved from one of the Naats written by the Shaykh in Urdu:

یا محمد مصطفیٰ□ قربان تیر□ نام پر، پاک سچا دین تیرا □و□ فدا اسلام پر

“O Muhammad Mustafa! I will sacrifice myself on your name. Your religion is pure and true, I will sacrifice myself on Islam.”

In another verse, he directly asks from the Prophet:

کشش اپنی دو زیاد□ دم بدم پاو□ کمال، پاس بلواؤ دک□اؤ یا رسول الل□ جمال

“Give me more love and attraction so I get more perfection. Call me to your nearness and show your light O Messenger of Allah!”

School of thought of the Shuyukh of Pir Fazal Ali Qureshi

Hadhrat Pir Qureshi was a follower of Shaykh Muhammad Sirajuddin of Musa Zai sharif in D.G Khan district of Pakistan. Shaykh Sirajuddin was himself a pure Mujaddidi, with no affiliation whatsoever with the Deoband or the Wahhabism. The graves of the shuyukh in Musa Zai

sharif were bricked, which is considered unlawful by the Deoband school of thought. A murid of the shaykh once objected to it in a letter written to him. Shaykh Sirajuddin relied him in a firm style and described to him the types of Bid'ah and told him that in certain conditions cementing the graves is allowed in Shariah. This is in contrast to the Deobandi scholars' rulings. In the same letter, the Shaykh told his murid that he had complained because of the effects of Wahhabism on his thoughts.

Shaykh Dost Muhammad Qandhari, the grandshaykh of Khwaja Sirajuddin, was also a follower of pure Mujaddidi school of thought. Although the Deoband school of thought had not emerged at that time, the effects of Najdi Wahhabism had reached the subcontinent and many scholars were infected by it. He also opposed that and in few letters written to his followers, he clearly forbid them from reading the books of Wahhabi scholars and being in company with them. This clearly shows he considered them a new sect and did not allow his followers to get their corrupt ideas from their teachings/books. It should be kept in mind that the Mujaddidi school of thought strictly follows the Ahl-as-Sunnah creed and forbids any kind of corruption in the belief.

Hadhrat Shah Ahmad Saeed Faruqi Mujaddidi, the shaykh of Hadhrat Dost Muhammad Qandhari and a famous scholar who is well known for his effort in the 1857 war of independence, also opposed the Wahhabism which arrived in the Indian subcontinent in his times. He wrote some articles and books regarding the matters of difference. One of his articles is about the validity of Mawlid-un-Nabi, the birth celebration of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), considered to be unlawful by the Deoband school of thought. Deobandi scholars consider it a Bid'ah (innovation) and strictly forbid their followers from celebrating it in any way. Would the Mujaddidi shuyukh follow Deobandi scholars, they would also consider it a Bid'ah. But Shah Ahmad Saeed not only proved its validity, he addressed the opponents

(Wahhabi scholars) in a harsh manner considering them a deviated sect of Islam.

Conclusion

The facts discussed are all from authentic sources. It is easy to conclude from these realities that the Mujaddidi shaykhs opposed the Wahhabism as a newly formed deviated sect of Islam. Moreover, Shaykh Fazal Ali Qureshi was not a Deobandi and did not have any kind of affiliation with the Deobandi scholars. He was a pure Mujaddidi shaykh and followed the Maslak (school of thought) of his Shuyukh only, which is based on the pure creed of Ahl-as-Sunnah as propagated by Imam Rabbani Mujaddid Alf Thani (r.a) himself. Unlike the Deobandi scholars who follow the Wahhabi ideology to some extent and most of their rulings (those differing with the Ahl-as-Sunnah) are indeed based on that ideology.

It is worth mentioning here that the case of Hadhrat Pir Fazal Ali Qureshi is very similar to that of Hadhrat Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki, who was not a Deobandi and followed the Ahl-as-Sunnah creed, but many of his khulafa were the top scholars of Deoband school of thought. In the matters of difference between Deoband and Ahl-as-Sunnah, he followed the Ahl-as-Sunnah creed and described those matters in his book called “Faisla Haft Masla”. In this book, he explains the seven most differed matters and his verdict goes towards the Ahl-as-Sunnah school of thought in all those matters.

And Allah knows better!

Talib Ghaffari

References:

http://urdu.islahulmuslimeen.org/urdu/books/pir_qureshi/06.htm

http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?37712-Khulafaa-of-Hazrat-Pir-Fazal-Ali-Qureshi

http://www.maktabah.org/index.php/component/content/article/90/788.html

Malfuzat Hadhrat Khwaja Abdul Ghaffar alias Pir Mitha (Larkana, Sindh)

Tajalliyat, by Mawlana Abdul Malik Siddiqi